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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP), the principal lingua franca of intercultural communication in multiethnic Nigeria, has no recognition as an official language but has penetrated the print and electronic media, especially in southern Nigeria. A survey in six urban centers in southern Nigeria, part of a larger study, investigated the status, perceptions, and future of ANP, including the roles anticipated for it in mass communication. Ten male and ten female practitioners in the mass media were selected from each geographic area. Interviews were also conducted with several media personalities. Results indicate a majority regard ANP as a language in its own right, and a larger proportion consider it a variety of English. About one-quarter feel it should be taught or used to teach in schools. Over one-third feel it should be an official language. Under one-third find it efficient, easy to learn, and spoken by most people. A very small mirority feel it aids in intercultural communication, and only one percent find it ethnically neutral. About 37 percent feel it retards learning of English. Variation among geographic areas was found. Both commonalities and disagreement were found among media personalities. Comments from interviews are excerpted. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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"Language, mass communication and national development: The role, perceptions and potential of Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin in the Nigerian mass media."

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(Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Language in Development; City Bayview Hotel, Langkawi, Malaysia; 29-31 July, '97).

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Abstract.

Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP) is an endogenous, Atlantic pidgin, which evolved from contacts between coastal peoples of present-day Nigeria, Portuguese sailors (15th century) and, subsequently, British traders and colonizers (18th century).

Variously called "Pidgin English", "Nigerian Pidgin English", "Nigerian Pidgin" or, simply, "Pidgin", this language is now the principal *lingua franca* of interethnic communication in a country that boasts more than 200 ethnic groups and the largest population in Africa. In spite of its lack of official recognition, at both administrative and educational levels, its sociolinguistic vitality is such that it is, in many urban centres, the principal medium of public trading and exchanges. ANP has also penetrated the print and electronic media, especially in southern Nigeria, where it is used for popular newspaper columns (e.g. *Wakabout*), and news and topical debate broadcasts on state radio and television stations (MANN, 1990; 1993b; 1996). Indeed, it is no secret that the most socially popular adverts, public awareness jingles, drama sketches, record request programmes, etc., are those in ANP.

This paper is a questionnaire- and interview-based attitudinal survey of the mass media in six urban centres in southern Nigeria, regarding the status, perceptions, and future of ANP, and the irresistible role and functions it is increasingly being called upon to play in mass communication. The paper also explores ANP's sociocommunicational spread and vitality, in light of national developmental efforts in this African country, with possible implications for other Third world nations.

> "The point...is not whether languages should or should not be maintained or ultimately survive, but whether communication needs exist now which require the use of the people's language if they are to participate in their own development or respond to intervention."
> (Robinson, 1996: 49)

Introduction:

Subsequent to their acceding to independence in the 1950s and 60s, many African neo-nations have had to deal simultaneously with multiple and diverse problems of nascent nationhood: national unity; economic and agricultural development; health; the urgent need for mass literacy; finding an acceptable national language policy that takes ethnic and regional tensions into consideration, while affording the possibility to participate in the concert of nations through science and technology, commerce and diplomacy; etc.. With hindsight, many today would regard this so-called independence as a 'poisoned' gift. Nigeria, the subject of this paper, is a clear example of such dilemmas of national development in the Third World.

Nigeria is an intensely and extensively mutlilingual country, boasting about a hundred million people - it is generally stated that one out of every five Africans is a Nigerian. The indigenous languages and dialects of Nigeria, which number more than two hundred, can be roughly classified into two language families: Afro-Asiatic (e.g. Hausa); and, Niger-Congo (e.g. Yoruba and Igbo) (Greenberg, 1970). Apart from Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, which have been constitutionally recognized as national languages for use at the Federal level, English has served as the sole official language, since independence i.e. Nigeria is a *part-exoglossic multinational state* (Kloss, 1968: 71). On this basis, it would

probably by classified as a country of the Outer Circle by Kachru (1986), in terms of its membership of the English-speaking world, and one grappling with the problems of *nationism* (as distinct from *nationalism*) (cf. Fishman 1968:42). He says of the language policy and planning problems associated with this type of categorization:

> The geographic boundaries are far in advance of sociocultural unity. Thus problems of horizontal integration, such as quick language choice and widespread literary language use, become crucial to the nation's functional existence per se."

In spite of the fact that English has been the official language since independence, and that the contact between the indigenous peoples and English spans about three centuries now, Bambgose (1992) estimates that only about 10% of Nigerians are literate in English; much fewer showing a standard mastery of it. In terms of language education, Oladejo (1993: 419) sums up the nation's predicament by stating that "it is no exaggeration to say that the Nigerian attempt to formulate and implement a coherent bilingual education policy has so far been an exercise in futility". Mann (1996: 104-105), while referring to the apparent failures of the national mass literacy programme, also attributes this inappropriacy to the structural-typological distance between English and the indigenous languages *in situ* - a situation whose consequence on the level of mass participation in the national developmental process makes him declare that "it might very well not be an overstatement to say that English, is, today, a language of captivity and deprivation in Nigeria" (see Mann, 1990; 1993b; 1996; Bamgbose, 1971; 1992; Oladejo, 1993; Akinasso, 1991, for elaborations on the language situation and language planning and

policy in Nigeria).

These tensions have come about principally on account of the *linguistic marginalisation* experienced by the greater mass of the national populations - a marginalization Robinson (1996: 63) describes as "the alienation experienced by the imposition in colonial times of foreign models of development through foreign languages".

According to Lepage (1964: 18):

> Wherever the language of the government and the law differs from that of the mass of the people, plans for economic, agricultural and industrial development are more difficult to make - because the basic research is hindered by the language barrier - and more difficult to put into effect. Linguistic diversity therefore acts as a brake on economic progress.

It is in the light of these ethnicosocial and sociolinguistic 'crossed wires', and the need for a more pragmatic and proactive solution to the internal contradictions and tensions implied, that Mann (1993b) proposes Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP) as a possible language candidate to play more and more formalized roles, given its everincreasing sociolinguistic momentum.

This paper sets out to evaluate the sociolinguistic vitality of ANP, especially in the context of its role and potential in the Nigerian mass media as a language tool that readily lends itself to more and greater functions of mass communication. The findings of a questionnaire survey on the attitudes of Nigerian mass media practitioners to ANP are also presented and discussed. In the ensuing discussion, the terms, *attitudes*, *development* and *development communication*, will bear the following meanings: attitudes will be defined as "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event" (Ajzen, 1988: 4); development will mean "a type of directed social

change that provides individuals with increased control over nature" (Rogers, 1989: 72); and, development communication will be regarded as "the application of communication to the goal of furthering development" (Rogers, op. cit.: 75).

Language, the mass media and national development in developing nations:

O'Brien (1979: 83) posits that the high degree of multilingualism typical of developing nations could pose problems in the context of national development:

> Multiplicity of languages are an obstacle to trade and the mobility of labour, technology and information generally...In certain African states today the multiplicity of languages slows down modernisation by impeding the dissemination of fundamental knowledge important to human well-being such as hygiene and agricultural techniques.

A similar suggestion is made by Robinson (1996: 25), when he states that "The most obvious fact which emerges from the distribution of multilingual environments...is that the highest concentrations of languages are in the developing world. This observation has provided the basis for asking whether language diversity is linked, causally or otherwise, to economic underdevelopment". The implication here, of course, is that there is an inverse proportional correlation between the degree of multilingualism in a country and its level of development. This is a worrying observation, especially when he adds that "a multilingual environment is part of the daily experience of the vast majority of people in the developing world" (idem.: 9). While the realization that all such languages cannot fully participate in the mainstream of national developmental efforts - wherefrom the language policies adopted so far, the question remains as to what language(s) should be

selected to perform such functions, and on what bases.

Nida & Wonderly (1971: 65-66) propose three minimal criteria for selecting a national language: (i) it should be politically neutral; (ii) it should be structurally-typologically accessible; and, (iii) it should be a mother tongue to a substantial speech community and be widespread. They contend that technological information is the most important singular factor on which progress in the present-day world depends, and offer the following advice:

> ...if so-called developing nations do not wish to condemn themselves to perpetual dependency and to an everincreasing lag they must make provision for either: (1) a sufficient number of persons fully educated in a language of specialized information and continually provided with books in such languages, or (2) adequate programmes of translation and publication of such materials in their national language, or (3) even better, a combination of these two approaches."

While this may be regarded as a realistic position to take on these matters, it is common knowledge that, for various reasons, including a lack of resources or political will, many governments of developing nations have hardly achieved the promised results; and, that the selected languages (of special information) have had difficulty finding a *niche* in the sociocommunicational fabric of these societies. In spite of relatively recent calls to governments of the Third World by the United Nations Organization, its specialized agencies, and international communication experts (see Asante & Gudykunst [eds.], 1989) to invest in, and be more aware of, the dynamics of *development communication*, Robinson (1996: 9) gives three reasons for their failure to do so, so far: the colonial heritage; an underestimation of its utility; and, political strategy.

In cases where there have been attempts at applying development communication, Awa

(1989: 429) remarks that it "moved in only one direction, downward from the designers and executors of development programs, and change agents received from their clients no clues on the effectiveness, or even the acceptability of new programs". At the end of the day, according to Ekwelie (1985: 28), the mass media in the Third World are "a poor servant of development". We will see, in the case of Nigeria, that this is probably more true of *development support communication* (i.e. communication in support of a specific development project) than it is of the other sense of development communication (i.e. strengthening the "climate of development") (Rogers, 1989: 72). However, the position of this author is that still more fine-tuning needs to be undertaken, if languages, such as ANP, are to realize their full potential in the country.

ANP, sociolinguistic vitality and the Nigerian mass media:

Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin - variously called "Pidgin English", "Nigerian Pidgin English"; "Nigerian Pidgin", and "Pidgin" - is an endogenous, Atlantic pidgin that evolved from contacts between the indigenous coastal peoples of present-day Nigeria and, first, Portuguese sailors (15th century), then, British traders and colonizers (18th century onwards). It is a language that structurally resembles the substratal languages, while most of its words are borrowed from English, though transformed according to indigenous phonologies. Although it is most regularly used, and is said to have creolized in parts of the Delta region (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991), it serves extensively the functions of an interethnic *lingua franca* in most urban centres, north and south. Bambgose (1971: 37) called it "a semi-official language in certain areas and in certain institutions (such as the

Nigeria Police)". Mafeni (1971: 98) says that "Nigerian Pidgin is essentially a product of the process of urbanisation. While its origins lie historically in the early contacts between Europeans and Africans on the coast, its development and spread is the result of contacts between Africans". He underlines (idem.: 99) the social prestige and attitudinal problem from which ANP has suffered, to date:

> Many Nigerians, although they use Pidgin as a register in certain, especially familiar contexts, are nevertheless ashamed to be associated with the language in public. This is probably a result of the influence of parents and school authorities, who have often discouraged its use because they consider it a debased form of English and not a language in its own right.

In spite of this, ANP is probably the language of the greatest interethnic communication, especially in urban centres; it is the language of the public market, university youth communication (Mann, 1993b), and the school domain (Mann, 1996) in the Pidgin zone (i.e. the Mid-West, East, and South-East of Nigeria). It is the language of sociocommunication, intimate and familiar conversation, humour, anger and proverbs. Its functions, spread and domain usage are evidently expanding and its structure is undergoing greater complexification.

With regard to its role in the Nigerian media, it is the language of the most popular radio and TV adverts, jingles, public service announcements, record requests, local political debates and drama sketches, and has been regularly used for newscasting in Edo, Delta and Rivers states since the 1980s (see Mann, 1993b, for a more elaborate treatment). Mafeni (op. cit.: 100) points out that "In spite of traditional attitudes of disapproval towards Pidgin, however, it appears that many Nigerian novelists, playwrights,

advertising agents, trade unionists and even politicians realise and have begun to exploit the great potentialities of the language as a medium of mass communication".

Ofuani (1981: 336) traces, with interest, the evolution of ANP in the print media: how it graduated from simply being a language of light, social entertainment in the weekly, *Lagos Weekend* (through the exploits of the incorrigible and comic character, 'Wakabout'), to its use "for satire, particularly when they involve government policy or political pronouncements" (e.g. 'Omoba' in *The Punch*, and 'Pappy Joe', in the *Nigerian Standard*). Understandably, he suggests the creation and adoption of a standard orthography for ANP, so as to broaden its functional range and intensify present levels of use in the print media.

Clearly, the three principal criteria proposed by Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977) for determining a language's *ethnolinguistic vitality* (i.e. status, demography and institutional support), with the premise that the more a language enjoyed each of these, the greater its vitality, may need to be reviewed in the light of languages, such as ANP, which are not ethnic languages, as such, and would, notionally, not satisfy these criteria, yet, show ample evidence of being very alive, sociocommunicationally. We may, henceforth, need to add the *communicational need* for the language as one of such parametres of evaluation.

Attitudes towards ANP in the Nigerian mass media:

This attitudes survey was part of a wider one conducted on ten socio-occupational groups (including market traders; the Army; the Police; students; etc.). A questionnaire survey

was undertaken in six urban centres in southern Nigeria (Calabar, Port-Harcourt, Warri, Benin, Lagos and Ibadan - except for the latter, which served as a control centre because of its predominantly Yoruba ethnolinguistic presence, all the other centres could be considered as belonging to the Pidgin zone [Mann, 1996]) - with a view to evaluating their attitudes towards ANP. Some interviews were also conducted with certain relevant media personalities in Calabar, Warri and Benin.

Respondents' profiles:

20 respondents (10 male; 10 female), practitioners in the media, were sampled in each centre, making a total of 120. The principal ethnic groups represented in the sample were: Yoruba (27%), Ibo (17%) and Edo (13%); 95% of the respondents were Christian.

66% of the sample claimed they came across ANP before the age of 10 years; principally at home (42%) and at school (24%). Peers constituted the main contact source (42%), followed by family (39%). 79% of the respondents claimed they spoke ANP well; 72% could recognize incorrect ANP; almost half them (49%) regarded 'Bendelites' (from the Mid-West) as the most proficient speakers of ANP, followed by Ibos (11%); finally, 21% attributed its genesis to Bendel, while 6% thought it came from Iboland. (NB: only the principal scores are presented.)

Findings:

The questionnaire survey:

The following principal points can be gleaned from the results of the questionnaire survey

(see Table below):

1) ANP is regarded as a language in its own right by a considerable majority of respondents, even if less than half think it is a 'normal' language; the latter may be explained by the fact that 81% consider it a variety of English.

2) Although only 1 in 4-5 respondents would not mind it being taught as a subject, or used to teach, almost over 1 in 3 would vote for it as official language. This is the second highest approval rating in the wider survey (after market traders: 44%).

ANP as a language:	
1. In your opinion, is ANP a language?	73
2. In your opinion, is ANP a 'normal' language?	45
3. In your opinion, is ANP a variety of English?	81
ANP as a school language:	
4. Should ANP be taught in schools?	27
5. Should ANP be used to teach in schools?	22
ANP as official language of Nigeria:	
6. Should ANP be adopted as official language of Nigeria?	38
Favourable reasons:	
a. ANP is efficient, easy to learn and spoken by most:	30
b. ANP aids interethnic communication:	7
c. ANP is ethnically neutral:	1
Unfavourable reasons:	
d. ANP retards learning of English (in children); leads to exam failures:	37
e. ANP is not standardized:	7
f. ANP is not understood by everyone:	5
g. ANP is not a world language:	6
h. ANP is not indigenous:	5
i. ANP does not sound 'sweet'and is a source of shame:	2
j. ANP is a 'no man's language':	-

Table : ANP (attitudes survey) approval ratings (in %) in the Nigerian mass media.

3) ANP's accessibility (of acquisition) seems to have far outweighed considerations of its

political neutrality.

4) The lack of a standard form of ANP was the second most important factor in its disfavour.

5) None of the respondents thought ANP was a 'no man's language'.

6) When reasons for the attitudes expressed by the respondents are put under macro-categories, like *communicational* (6a, b, f, g) and *educational/socioeconomic* (6d, e), we find that the former hold sway (48%; 44%, for the latter), unlike in the findings for the educational sector (Mann, 1996), where the scores were more even at about 44%.

7) In terms of the impact of independent variables, overall, the best approval ratings came from Benin, while Calabar registered the worst scores; paradoxically, only 35% of the respondents in Port-Harcourt favoured its use as official language. Ethnically-significant differences appear to be item-specific; it is, however, remarkable that while Edos approved ANP as official language at 43%, there was little to separate Ibos and Yorubas (35% and 31%, respectively). This may be explained by the fact that members of both groups are probably of an educational level (through English) that they feel less need to use ANP for more formal functions. Finally, although the approval ratings of female respondents were regularly lower than those of male respondents for most of the items of the survey, this was not statistically significant.

The interviews:

The interview findings presented here are those of Calabar (an editor of "The Chronicle", a daily), Warri (a radio producer of programmes in ANP; and, a radio/TV newscaster in

ANP - both of the Delta Broadcasting Corporation) and Benin (an acting General Manager, News and Current Affairs, Edo Broadcasting Service); they were all male, between 30-40 years of age.

The principal findings of these interviews are summarized below:

The editor at "The Chronicle":

ANP is a language, even if it needs to be better developed; it is widely used all over the country by people from various tribal origins. While it should not be taught in schools, since English and other subjects (taught through English) will be negatively affected thereby, it can be selectively used to teach. While it could be adopted as an official language in Nigeria, if it is adequately developed, English should not be abandoned because it is a world language and the best option to prevent tribal tensions in matters of official language choice. No tribal language should be adopted in its place.

Producer of radio broadcasts in ANP, Delta State Broadcasting Corporation:

Most Nigerians speak and understand ANP; the most popular TV drama sketches and music hits (e.g. "Sweet Mother" by Nico Mbarga) are in ANP. Those who claim that it is 'bad language' have an attitude problem. Lack of documentation and governmental support are responsible for the present poor social status of ANP.

Radio/TV newscaster and translator in ANP, Delta Broadcasting Corporation:

Ted, who translates the news from English into ANP, using an idiolectal orthography, points out that the news in ANP is aimed at the wider (illiterate) population. He describes

attempts to ban ANP in primary schools in the Delta as unfortunate, since what it needs is to be developed into an official *lingua franca*.

AGM, News and Current Affairs, Edo Broadcasting Service:

ANP is a "street language" and is a "corrupted" form of English, which is frowned upon by the élite. Although used, since 1985, for local news and discussion programmes in the-then Bendel Broadcasting Service, it had been dropped (by the Edo half) from use in the media after the government's decision to split Bendel state into Edo and Delta states. ANP should not be promoted in the media, but rather should be left in the streets, where it belongs. (Apart from admitting that he did not speak or understand ANP well, this respondent suddenly became embarrassed and flexible in his views, when he learned, during the course of the interview, that I could speak ANP and am Nigerian - my fair complexion and name having misled him into believing I was British.)

In sum, all those interviewed agreed that ANP is a language widely used across tribal lines in Nigeria, and could be selectively used to teach in schools. It could be adopted as official language, with some further standardization and developement, and government recognition and support. They appeared divided on the question of teaching it as a subject in schools and abandoning English as the official language of Nigeria.

Conclusion & recommendations:

Without wishing to overstate the case, the perspective taken by this author in this paper is

that a language is a natural resource that needs to be recorded, nurtured, managed and audited like any other. Given what appears to be the ineffectual results obtained by top-down language policies inspired in many Third world countries by the colonial heritage, it is now time for governments to review the whole question of what language resources they have and what languages will be best suited for what purposes of social cohesion and national development. This requires on-going sociolinguistic surveys, in the case of Nigeria, following the present politico-administrative set-up i.e. starting from the local government level. As Awa (op. cit.: 432) reminds us, "all development plans require data on human and natural resources". Informed and possibly efficient decision-making can only come about, if such data are at the disposal of decision-makers.

While the case made here has been one for ANP, it applies to all indigenous languages in Nigeria. Naturally, it would be easier to start with those that are already enjoying considerable sociocommunicational currency. Efforts should be made to record, graphize and standardize them so as to give them a hope of performing 'higher' functions.

ANP is evidently a "developing language" i.e. a language "undergoing greatest and most rapid change in societal functions and therefore most exposed to substantial planned and unplanned change" (Fishman, 1968: 9). While the ratings delivered by the attitudes survey may seem low to some, they are in fact decent, given that this is a non-formalized language suffering poor social prestige, and no institutional support. Though there is no suggestion that their circumstances are completely similar, ANP, like Bazaar Malay and Bahasa Indonesia, can and will handle any communicational challenge it gets. Its use in

the media should be stabilized, promoted and extended. Apart from its yearning for standardization, its greatest enemy at the moment is the attitude problem of which it is an incredulous victim. As Wurm (1968: 353) said of Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea: "Rarely has a language been maligned as much as this idiom, and at the same time been found so useful or, more correctly, indispensable".

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